

Baptism of Our Lord

“HELLO, MY NAME IS...”

Isaiah 43:1-7

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Analysis by Paige G. Evers

*But now thus says the Lord,
he who created you, O Jacob,
he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
I give Egypt as your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.
Because you are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you,
I give people in return for you,
nations in exchange for your life.
Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
and from the west I will gather you;
I will say to the north, “Give them up,”
and to the south, “Do not withhold;
bring my sons from far away
and my daughters from the end of the earth-
everyone who is called by my name,*

*whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.”*

DIAGNOSIS: Anonymous Sinners

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Without a Name*

Look around your neighborhood, whether you're in a tightly packed city, a leafy suburb, or a rural setting. How many neighbors can you call by first and last name? In some neighborhoods, people know the names of the dogs, but not the names of their owners. It's easy to be anonymous. When no one knows your name, you don't have to risk getting too close, too involved in other people's messy lives. You see yourself as having total freedom, because you don't have to answer to anyone. No one has a claim on you.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Lonely*

Occasionally, though, a strange feeling bubbles to the surface. You could call it fear: the fear of being alone. When you're a free agent, there's no one but yourself to rely on. No one but yourself to trust. You sense that there are waters rising around you and you may even smell something burning, but you squash the fear. You convince yourself that you can handle it on your own.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Burned*

That illusion can't last. When it comes time to "pass through the waters" or "walk through fire" (v. 2), you find out what it means to be truly alone. Since nobody knows you, and you know nobody, including God, there is no help from the outside. Choosing to live in anonymity, trusting only in one's own strength, turns out to be condemning, not freeing. Even when we think we're safely anonymous, God finds us and judges our sin. Choosing to be alone means that when we pass through rivers, we

will be overwhelmed; through fire, we will be burned (v. 2). All that will remain of us is an unidentifiable heap of ashes.

PROGNOSIS: Named Saints

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Redeemed

Through the prophet Isaiah, we hear the announcement of God's name, which assures us that fire doesn't have to be our ultimate future. "I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior," (v. 3) the prophet declares. Just what kind of God, Holy One, and Savior we have comes to light in the Gospel text for the Baptism of Our Lord. We have a God who sent his own Son to be born, to be baptized, and to die for our sin. God announces at Jesus' baptism, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). Jesus, the Beloved, will be crucified. He will suffer the floods and fires that we deserve and give us the righteousness of his name. We might not know God, but in Jesus Christ, God knows us. Joined to the death and resurrection of Christ through our baptism, we are given a new identity. No longer anonymous, we now belong to God, who promises, "I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine" (v. 1).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Fearless

Now that we know God through Christ, we know ourselves and we know to whom we belong. Belonging to God drives away the fear of being alone. It propels us toward trusting in God's extravagant promises instead of in our own strength. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you," God declares; "when you walk through fire, you shall not be burned" (v. 2). We no longer have to protect ourselves by maintaining our anonymity. It is enough to rest in God's assurance that "you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you" (v. 4). God's promises give our hearts peace and courage.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Reaching Out

Confident that you are more than your name, that you are first and foremost a baptized and beloved child of God, you can look at the world, and even around your neighborhood, with new eyes. That man that you always see at the mailbox who looks worried when the bills come? That woman walking her dog who recently started wearing a tell-tale chemotherapy handkerchief over her head? That harried-looking dad at the bus stop who returns his kids to your neighborhood after he's had them for the weekend? Find out their names. Learn their stories. Then tell them the story of Jesus. Share the great news that God created them and formed them (v. 1). Tell them what God has told you, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you" (v. 1) and "do not fear, for I am with you (v. 5). Invite them to hear God call them by name (v. 1) and gather them (v. 5) into a community where they no longer have to be anonymous or alone.